EAST POTOMAC PARK (Reservation No. 332) (Hains Point) Washington District of Columbia HABS NO. DC-692

HARS DU WASH 597-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
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Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS DC WASH 597-

EAST POTOMAC PARK (Hains Point) (Reservation No. 332)

HABS No. DC-692

<u>Location</u>: East Potomac Park is a spit of land between the Washington Channel and the Potomac River in Washington's southwest quadrant. The elevated railroad bridge forms the northern boundary between East and West Potomac parks.

Owner/Manager: U.S. government, National Park Service.

<u>Present Use</u>: In addition to recreational uses, East Potomac Park is also the site of park administration facilities and a heavily traveled commuter route.

Significance: Reclaimed in the late nineteenth century from the marshes and tidal flats of the Potomac River by the Army Corps of Engineers, East Potomac Park was developed as a large urban recreation area in the early twentieth century.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

- 1. Date of plan: The land was reclaimed from the Potomac River according to a plan devised in 1882. Its development as an recreational area is largely according to the McMillan Senate Park Commission plan of 1902.
- 2. Original and subsequent owners: When the land for the city was acquired by the federal government in the 1790s, most of the area that now comprises East Potomac Park was within the Potomac River. The land mass formed here in the late nineteenth century by the Army Corps of Engineers became the property of the U.S. government.
- 3. Improvements, alterations, and additions:

1882-1911:	Land mass formed through dredging and the construction of
	retaining walls.

1913-16:	Roadway	built around	perimetei	r ot	park.
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1917:	Complex of barracks built on the channel side of the park	to
	house war workers	

1921: Tourist camp erected on the northwest side of the park.

1931: Concrete walk with pipe-rail fence constructed around the

perimeter of the park at the water's edge.

1943: Temporary buildings erected to house wartime workers.

1959-62: Senator Francis Case bridge erected through the park and across the Washington Channel to connect the Potomac river

bridges to Southeast/Southwest Freeway.

1963:

National Park Service, National Capital Region Headquarters building erected at 1100 Ohio Drive on the site of the tourist camp.

B. Historical Context:

The huge landmass comprising East and West Potomac parks is notably absent from early maps of the city (See also West Potomac Park, HABS No. DC-693). East Potomac Park was created as the result of a massive project in the last two decades of the nineteenth century to clear navigable channels in the Potomac River. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, regional commerce depended on the river, but its depth and flow fluctuated frequently. North of Easby's Point, near the site of today's Theodore Roosevelt Bridge, the Potomac River was a narrow mountain creek with a deep, rocky bottom fed by fresh water from about 20,000 square miles of territory. As it flowed along the west side of the City of Washington, the approximately 900'-wide river expanded to about 5,000', spreading across a soft, shallow riverbed of mud, sand, and decaying vegetation. From this point, the river continued south as a slow, shallow tidewater to its mouth at the Chesapeake Bay. This shift in the river's constitution was one of the features that prompted George Washington to select the area as the federal capital. Access to the ocean had already encouraged commerce and settlement in the thriving ports of Georgetown and Alexandria, and George Washington envisioned that a canal constructed alongside the river as it continued northwest of the city would provide an ideal trading route into the nation's interior.

As the Potomac abruptly transformed from deep, narrow, and fast to shallow, wide, and sluggish, the soft bottom south of Easby's Point shifted with the currents and tides. Increasing regional population exacerbated the sandbars and stagnation that periodically blocked channels in the early 1800s. As land was cleared and cultivated north of the city, runoff and erosion added debris and silt to the stream that collected and settled in the river as it slowly flowed past the new city.

The City Canal contributed more solid mass to the waterway, and bridges built across the river from Washington to Virginia further impeded its rate of flow. The canal included on L'Enfant's original city plan was chartered in 1815 to provide a shortcut for boats through the city to the Anacostia River. Sewage and silt runoff from newly cleared streets soon filled the canal, however, and drained back into the river creating noxious mud flats near the canal mouth south of the White House. As these flats expanded, they threatened commerce in the Washington Channel along the city's southwest shore. The almost 5,000'-long Long Bridge, built in 1808-09 to carry traffic from the southwest terminus of Maryland Avenue to Virginia, stood on thirty-nine broad piers that slowed the water enough for silt to collect to its north, and portions of the bridge were repeatedly damaged and carried away by floods and ice floes. A new bridge built in 1835 was extended from a causeway over the shoals that by then covered half the river's original width. In 1863, during the Civil War, another crossing was erected 75' downstream from Long Bridge to carry the Georgetown and Alexandria Railroad,

¹ Chappell, 1.

² Chappell, 8.

further impeding the river's flow.

The mud flats south of the White House were so virulent during the war that President Abraham Lincoln spent nights at the Soldiers Home north of the city to avoid their stench and "miasmatic influences." President Andrew Johnson's poor health was blamed in part on the bad air wafting over the White House, so Army Corps engineer Nathaniel Michler was assigned to seek a new site for the executive mansion far from the "pestilent flat on which a large portion of the sewerage of the city [was] cast to fester in the sun."

Perhaps to legitimize Michler's 1867 survey results, control of the federal land in the city was transferred the same year from the Department of the Interior to the Department of War, with Michler assigned as chief of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (OPB&G). The White House relocation effort fell by the wayside after Ulysses S. Grant's election in 1868, but Michler, well acquainted with the city's plan and geography after his survey, addressed the problems posed by the erratic river. Armed with soundings performed by the Coast Survey, Michler recommended narrowing the riverbed to increase its rate of flow by dredging a deep channel near the Washington shore depositing the muck from the river's bottom on the marshy flats west and south of the Monument Grounds. The benefits of such a project were threefold: a clear channel for ships, the elimination of the malarial flats, and the enhancement of "the extent and beauty of the public grounds about the monument which is being erected to the memory of Washington."

Although no definitive reclamation strategy was developed during Michler's term, he did oversee repeated piecemeal projects to clear the river. During his three-year tenure the flats expanded noticeably, and the river grew shallower, proving his point that random dredging was a futile exercise. After responsibility for the river transferred to Maj. William P. Craighill in the early 1870s, Congress created a Board of Survey to prepare a permanent plan for the improvement of the Washington and Georgetown harbors. Despite the study, no funds were allocated for its implementation, and arbitrary dredging efforts continued throughout the next decade. River dredgers deposited the hauled muck and soil in two designated places; the Harbor Flats, which included the region south of the railroad bridge between the Washington Channel and the central Potomac Channel (later to become East Potomac Park), and the Potomac Flats described as "any locality below the city . . . sufficiently removed from the channel and otherwise suitable for dumping which the bidder might be able to find."5 Since there were no retaining walls, the soil eventually slipped back into the channel meeting new deposits brought down the river by floods or "freshets."

Sylvanius T. Abert oversaw river improvements in the late 1870s and affirmed the need for a systematic reclamation plan; his supervisor, Engineer Commissioner William J. Twining, recommended ending the Washington Channel at Long Bridge and constructing a tidal basin at its head equipped with floodgates that would release a strong flow of water with the receding tide and naturally flush debris from the channel. By creating high and firm land over the mud flats,

³ Cowdrey, 24.

⁴ Annual Report . . ., 1867, 525.

⁵ Chappell, 22.

Twining envisioned that the government would be more than recompensed for reclamation costs when the new property was sold for private development.

It was a major flood on February 12, 1881, that ultimately prompted congressional action. When the ice that had formed on the river during an unusually cold winter began to break apart and float downstream, it stacked up around the piers of the Long Bridge, forming a dam in the river. Within hours, the river rose dramatically, putting about 254 acres of the city under water. The flood submerged most of the area south of Pennsylvania Avenue, reaching the foot of Capitol Hill and surging dangerously close to the White House. Less than a month later, on March 3, Congress passed the Rivers and Harbors Act to provide a survey "with reference to the improvement of navigation, the establishment of a harbor line, and the raising of the flats so far as their improvement may be necessary to the improvement of navigation and the establishment of the harbor line."

The survey board, led by Lt. Col. Quincy A. Gillmore of the Corps of Engineers, derived its plan from the 1872 survey, Twining's and Abert's revisions of 1879 and 1881, and reports of similar projects undertaken in Holland. On August 2, 1882, Congress allocated \$400,000 to begin the reclamation process outlined in the Gillmore Report. Peter Conover Hains, appointed to oversee the project, divided the area to be reclaimed into three parts. Section I, due south of the White House between Easby's Point and 17th Street, was the most noxious and was where the reclamation project began.

Private contractors dredged the river bottom with scows equipped with clam diggers and dippers. Laborers then loaded the muck on rail cars traversing the flats on a network of wood trestles, to spread it evenly over the marshy land. As the channel was dredged, a retaining wall was erected to keep the reclaimed land from slipping back into the river. To build these walls, contractors excavated trenches then lined them with mattresses of woven brush floated into place then submerged by loads of rocks and riprap piled on top. By 1883, 8,000 linear feet of retaining wall was in place, and dredgers began digging immediately outside the barriers, and dumping the fill behind them to form a firm and continuous embankment. By August 1884, contractors began forming an embankment along the Washington Channel in Section III, the Harbor Flats region south of the railroad bridge that would later be known as East Potomac Park.

In 1884 new contractors Benson and McNee introduced an hydraulic dredger that sucked muck from the river bottom and sprayed it over the areas being reclaimed. By this method, the fill material was suspended in water, so small channels had to be formed to drain the water after the solid matter had precipitated to the bottom. Although more complex than earlier methods the McNee dredge was more efficient, spreading the fill more evenly across the flats, and less expensive, eliminating the need for extensive trestle networks.⁸

By 1885 work had progressed into Section II—the area between the Washington Monument Grounds and the region set aside for a tidal basin. By the time Hains was transferred from his post in 1891, the groundwork for East and West Potomac parks was firmly in place. His successors continued work at an

⁶ Annual Report . . ., 1882, 978.

⁷ Chappell, 34-36.

⁸ Chappell, 39.

unsteady pace subject to varying annual congressional allocations and frequent setbacks from floods, freezing, and equipment failures. By 1893 the commissioner in charge asked for additional funds to clear the prolific growth of weeds, willows, and underbrush in the fertile reclaimed soil—the first indication that the flats resembled dry land. He also requested police patrols of the unimproved area.

As the project progressed landowners sued for ownership of the reclaimed land, until finally the Martin F. Morris et al. v. United States, or the Potomac Flats case, was resolved by the Supreme Court in 1898 in favor of the U.S. government. Even before federal ownership was assured, discussion arose over the use of the reclaimed land. Twining and Michler recommended selling it for private development, as was done in Boston's Back Bay. Washington banker and financier Charles Carroll Glover advocated its development as a large riverside park. Glover prevailed in 1897 when Congress passed Senate Bill 3307 establishing that the "entire area formerly known as the Potomac Flats, and now being reclaimed, together with the tidal reservoirs be, and the same are hereby, made and declared a public park, under the name of the Potomac Park, and to be forever held and used as a park for the recreation and pleasure of the people." 10

As debates ensued over the ownership and use of the reclaimed land, a greater aesthetic and social movement was afoot in Washington and across the nation. The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago solidified the City Beautiful movement promoted by architects and landscape architects such as Daniel Burnham, Charles McKim, and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. The fair featured gleaming white, classically inspired buildings arranged in a formal landscaped setting of sparkling fountains and lagoons. These designers and their colleagues at the American Institute of Architects envisioned Washington as the White City on the Potomac--a permanent manifestation of the ideals exhibited temporarily on the shores of Lake Michigan. To derive a new park plan for the city, Michigan Sen. James McMillan introduced a bill creating the Senate Park Commission, which was comprised of Burnham, McKim, Olmsted, sculptor Auguste St. Gaudens, and Charles Moore as secretary. The committee's final report, published in 1902 after extensive studies of cities in America and abroad, incorporated the newly reclaimed land in its grand scheme for Washington's central core.

While the northern segment of the reclaimed land, later to become West Potomac Park incorporated monuments and formal spaces, the long spit to the south was to be developed as a recreational park. Finding in Washington a "positive dearth of means of innocent enjoyment for one's leisure hours" the commission envisioned in this park a large stadium for athletic contests, a swimming pool, and fields for organized sports. 11

When the last load of dirt was dumped on East Potomac Park on August 30, 1911, the land stood 14' above mean low tide in the center and 11' above low tide

⁹ Chappell, 50.

¹⁰ Chappell, 66.

^{11 &}quot;Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia," (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1902) as quoted in Commission of Fine Arts, 26.

on the sides.¹² On August 24, 1912, East Potomac Park was transferred to OPB&G and added to its list of federal reservations as Reservation No. 333. To provide access to the park, the OPB&G first constructed a roadway around the park's perimeter. During the four years that the roadway was under construction, the OPB&G cleared the land in the center of the park of wild growth and planted grass. In 1912, Japanese Cherry trees were planted along the roadway, and 46,650 shrubs were planted in temporary propagating beds on the south side of the railroad bridge.

After the United States entered World War I, local Boy Scouts were granted use of some of the land in 1917 to plant a war garden as part of a nationwide movement to use every possible resource toward the war effort. After the armistice, parts of the park continued to be used for victory gardens, however, and 60 acres of the park were divided into vegetable gardens in 1921. As in West Potomac Park, East Potomac Park was also commandeered by the military. Fortyone buildings were erected on 15 acres near the railroad embankment to accommodate army troops assigned to protect Washington. On the Washington Channel side of the park, fifty-seven barracks were built to house enlisted clerks in the war department. For the most part, these buildings were torn down in 1921 although some remained and were used for storage.

The site of military barracks on the west side of the park was converted into a six-acre tourist camp in 1921. The automobile promoted tourism in the nation's capital and visitors could park their cars and stay the night at either a cabin or in a tent at the camp. A row of poplar trees were planted on the south side of the railroad tracks to screen the frequent trains from the campers; a formal hedge encircling the camp, divided it from the surrounding golf courses. Campers at the site had access to hot and cold water, showers, a gas station, laundry, and commissary. Described as "a city in miniature," the camp served thousands of visitors each year. 13

Construction of the golf course continued throughout the war, and by 1920, it was opened for play. In 1920, more than 40,370 golfers paid 25 cents to play the nine-hole course. By 1923, the second nine holes were completed and management of the facility was turned over to a concessionaire. For a brief period between 1919 and 1921, the park was accessible not only by automobile, but also by ferry. A boat called the <u>Bartholdi</u> ferried passengers between the government wharf in Southwest and the tip of West Potomac Park, named Hains Point in 1917. Horses were also a means of transportation in the early twentieth century and a recreational riding grounds with horse jumps was established in 1923 near the Virginia Channel east of the railroad embankment.

A long promenade around the perimeter of the park was among the original plans. The concrete walk with a pipe-rail fence along the water was begun in 1919-20 but the four-mile promenade was not completed until 1931. The most popular means of access by far, however, was by automobile. As the number of automobiles in the District increased, the park attracted more and more visitors seeking the cool breezes at Hains Point in the midst of Washington's hot summers.

¹² Chappell, 93.

¹³ Grosvenor, 529.

¹⁴ Chappell, 118.

To accommodate the increasing number of motorists, the OPB&G built a shelter with restrooms at the southern tip of the park in 1922. Several rooms in the lodge were leased to a group of Girl Scouts who had been serving refreshments to tourists from a temporary shelter on the point. (See Girl Scout Tea House HABS No. DC-549). The tea house thrived throughout the 1920s and was turned over in 1926 to a concessionaire, the Welfare and Recreation Association of Public Buildings and Grounds—a forebear of today's Guest Services Inc.

By 1925, the park was considered fully developed for recreational use, and over the ensuing years most construction was limited to maintenance and minor improvements. Despite the CFA's repeated objections to the tourist camp in the urban core, the facility was actually expanded in 1927 with the addition of a new stucco recreation building.

When the United States entered World War II, NPS closed the tea house at Hains Point since its use as a recreational automotive destination was inconsistent with the national effort to conserve tires and gas. Toward the north end of the park, five more tempos were built in the park to house wartime workers. A bicycle-rental facility in the park thrived on the business from the new crowd of wartime workers.

After the war, the tea house resumed service and the building was expanded in 1949-50. Regional population had increased with the war and subsequently, traffic congestion worsened. The stables closed in 1950 when the mixture of automobiles and equestrians were seen as a safety hazard. Likewise the demand for bicycles decreased and the rental shop closed in 1955. More bridges were built to carry traffic across the Potomac River into Virginia. Although the new bridges originated from West Potomac Park, north of the railroad crossing, the Sen. Francis Case Bridge built in 1959-62 and other approach roads cut through East Potomac Park. In 1963, the tourist camp was finally eradicated when the headquarters for the National Capital Region of the National Park Service was built on the site southwest of the railroad bridge.

The NPS then converted the old tea house, which served its last meal in 1962, to a visitors center. After 1967 the building was used as an NPS office until it was finally razed in 1987. Despite the historical significance of the building, it flooded frequently and needed costly repairs. Furthermore, Park Service officials saw no need to find adaptive reuses for the building that would attract more visitors to the park since it was already overused and congested with automobiles. In 1988, Congress designated Hains Point for the site of a National Peace Garden.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Overall dimensions: At its widest point, East Potomac Park is about one-third-mile wide. It is approximately 1.9 miles from the railroad bridge to the point on the channel side and 1.6 miles from the railroad bridge to the point on the river side, and it encompasses almost 330 acres.

B. Materials:

1. Roadways, paths, paving: Ohio Drive is a paved roadway running the entire length of East Potomac Park's waterfront. For most of its

¹⁵ Chappell, 166.

approximately 3.5-mile distance, its traffic travels one way, clockwise. Buckeye Drive is a 0.32-mile roadway crossing the park at its north end. A concrete walkway also runs the full length of the waterfront. Much of the area between Buckeye Drive and the freeway and railroad bridge is paved as parking lots or tennis courts.

2. Vegetation: Most of East Potomac Park is encompassed by the sodded golf course. Trees and shrubs are scattered throughout the course and are planted more densely all along the waterfront walkway.

3. Structures:

- a. Benches: Metal-frame wood slat benches are interspersed along the waterfront walkway facing the water.
- b. Statues: Although there are no permanent memorials or statues in East Potomac Park, temporary works have been displayed near the point. A five-piece bronze statue called the Awakening, depicting a man emerging from the earth, has been on display throughout the 1980s.
- 4. Buildings: A number of buildings are located in East Potomac Park, including the NPS National Capital Region headquarters, the Tourmobile headquarters and garage, maintenance buildings, U.S. Park Police buildings, structures associated with the East Potomac Park Golf Course, several restroom facilities, and a picnic shelter.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Maps:

Army Corps of Engineers. "Map of the City of Washington showing the Public Reservations." 1884, 1887, 1894.

National Park Service, Branch of Plans and Design. "Master Plan: National Capital Parks The Central Area." 1936.

B. Park plans and early views: See Supplemental Information below for a list of attached plans. Additional plans are located at the Office of Land Use, National Capital Region.

C. Bibliography:

Chappell, Gordon. <u>East and West Potomac Parks: A History</u>. Denver. National Park Service, 1973.

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Reservations Collection. Historical Society of Washington.

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- U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on the District of Columbia. The Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia. ed. by Charles Moore. Washington, D.C.: G.P.O., 1902.

Prepared by: Elizabeth Barthold

Project Historian National Park Service

1993

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION:

The Plan of Washington, D.C., project was carried out from 1990-93 by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division, Robert J. Kapsch, chief. The project sponsors were the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation Inc. of Washington, D.C.; the Historic Preservation Division, District of Columbia Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, which provided Historic Preservation Fund monies; the National Capital Region and its White House Liaison office, NPS; and the National Park Foundation Inc.

HABS historian Sara Amy Leach was the project leader and Elizabeth J. Barthold was project historian. Architectural delineators were: Robert Arzola, HABS; Julianne Jorgensen, University of Maryland; Robert Juskevich, Catholic University of America; Sandra M. E. Leiva, US/ICOMOS-Argentina; and Tomasz Zweich, US/ICOMOS-Poland, Board of Historical Gardens and Palace Conservation. Katherine Grandine served as a data collector. The photographs are by John McWilliams, Atlanta, except for the aerial views, which are by Jack E. Boucher, HABS, courtesy of the U.S. Park Police - Aviation Division.

PART V. SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Page 11 1920:

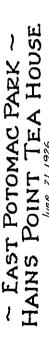
Aerial view (NPS Reservation Files).

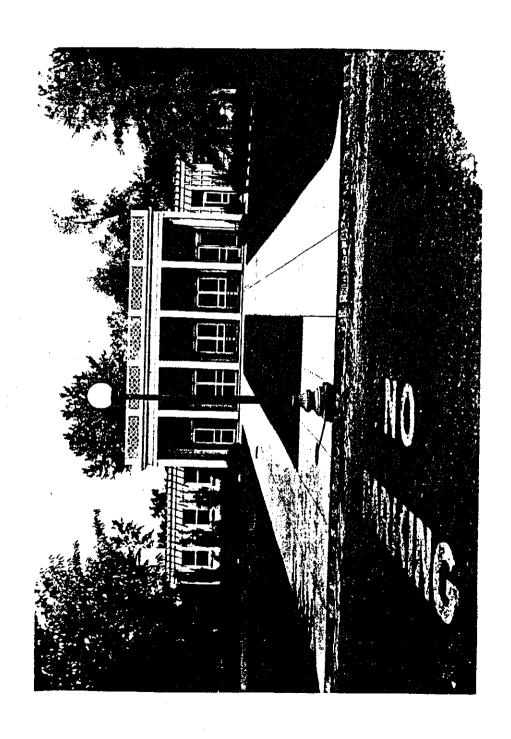
Page 12	1924;	Plan of park and survey form (NPS Reservation Files).
Page 13	1926:	East Potomac Park, Hains Point Tea House (NPS Reservation Files).
Page 14	1927:	View of Tourist Camp showing field house and new bungalows (NPS Reservation Files).
Page 15	1930:	Model of public golf course, playgrounds, and canal (Commission of Fine Arts, Eleventh Report).
Page 16	ca. 1931:	Aerial view of the Tourist Camp (Grosvenor 529).



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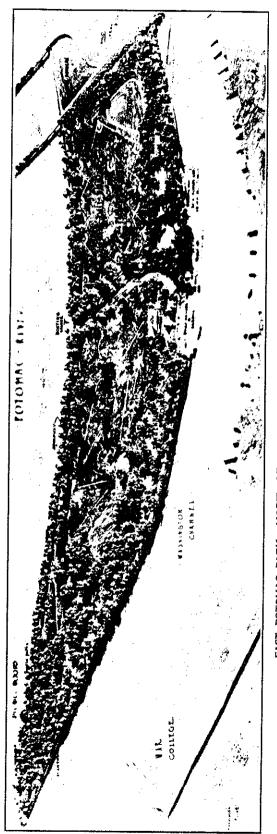
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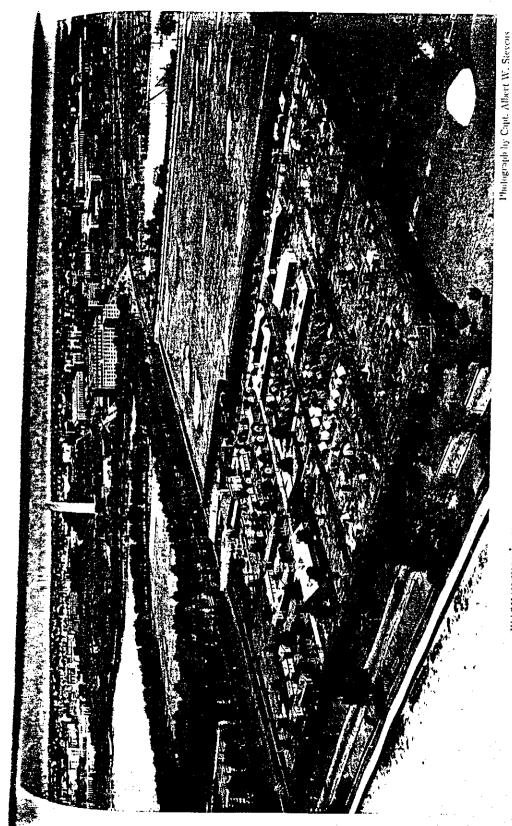








EAST POTOMAC PARK. MODEL OF PUBLIC GOLF COURSE, PLAYGROUNDS, AND CANAL



WASHINGTON'S TOURIST CAMP FOR THOSE WHO TAKE THE OPEN ROAD

Since 1921, thousands of travelers have made good use of the model tourist cann in East Potomic Park. Here are permanent tents for rent, with her for children, well-laid-out streets, sanitary severage, the camp is a city in miniature. It is serected by trees from Potomic Park Driveway, which surrounds it.